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SUBJECT: Ambassador's September 1 Farewell Call on
Politburo Member Phan Dien

1. (SBU) Summary: During his September 1 farewell call on Politburo member Phan Dien, the Ambassador underlined the importance of 2005 in U.S.-Vietnam relations and, although there had been good progress over the past three years, stressed that much work remained in bilateral relations, such as in law enforcement cooperation. In response to the Ambassador's question about preparations for the (early 2006) tenth Party Congress, Dien said that the Congress would seek to pursue Vietnam's "doi moi" (renovation) policy "on a deeper level and more broadly." In response to the Ambassador's question about "peaceful evolution," Dien said that concerns about peaceful evolution were directed towards officials and party members who were in danger of losing the respect of the people as they "learned to love money" during Vietnam's transformation into a market economy. End Summary.

2. (SBU) The Ambassador, accompanied by Pol/C, paid a farewell call September 1 on Politburo member Phan Dien. (Note: Dien, ranked sixth in the Politburo, is a standing member of the CPV Central Committee's Secretariat and bears responsibility for ideology-related issues. End note.) The Ambassador opened by noting the progress over the past three years to deepen and broaden the bilateral relationship, which of course happened because both the United States and Vietnam so desired. Since June 2003, there had been much success in normalizing military-to-military relations, expanding humanitarian cooperation, and establishing a much better strategic dialogue between the two countries' leaders. The United States was well aware that CPV leadership was critical in making decisions to advance the relationship, and the Ambassador congratulated Dien and his colleagues for the strategic vision required to do this.

3. (SBU) The United States hoped to continue to normalize its ties with Vietnam, particularly in areas such as law enforcement cooperation, the Ambassador said. We also needed to have more high-level visits. 2005 would be an important year for the relationship, and we were already planning major events to commemorate the tenth anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations, including the visit to the United States of Prime Minister Phan Van Khai. In fact, we still hoped that Dien would be able to reschedule his own visit to the United States. The Embassy had been in touch with MFA regarding a number of actions that could ensure a successful visit by the PM, which we had discussed in a previous conversation with Dien. The other important event in 2005 would be a Congressional vote on permanent normal trade relations as a part of Vietnam's WTO accession process, the Ambassador said.

4. (SBU) Dien said that the Ambassador's three years in Vietnam were closely tied to the continuing process of normalizing bilateral relations, and there had been many great achievements. For example, thanks to the contributions of the Ambassador, the WTO accession negotiations had been advanced. In the area of trade and investment, however, the level of U.S. foreign direct investment was still low, but Vietnam hoped that, with the support of the U.S.-ASEAN Business Council and others, FDI would increase. Regarding political cooperation, there had been much improvement over the past three years, and there had been good visits between both countries. Vietnam hoped to have good visits next year as well. If the Prime Minister's visit were realized, it would be a good chance to push the relationship forward even more, Dien said.

5. (SBU) Thanking the Ambassador for all of his contributions to advancing the relationship, Dien agreed that bilateral ties could and should be further developed. High-level visits were a good way to do this. As for the specific issues remaining between the United States and Vietnam -- which the Ambassador had raised in separate meetings with the leadership of Vietnam -- Dien said he was aware of them and hoped that some recommendations "will be realized." The key point was that relations between the United States and Vietnam had much room for improvement. Vietnam shared this view, and, although there had been the "disadvantage of history," Vietnam and the United States

should be able to overcome this. Dien expressed his hope that, during the Ambassador's time in Vietnam, he had been able to understand the "psychology" of the Vietnamese people.

16. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that there was much interest in the United States in Vietnam's 10th Party Congress (scheduled for early 2006) and its ongoing preparations. Of particular interest was what the Congress would mean for Vietnam and its bilateral relationship with the United States. As the preparations moved forward, the Ambassador asked Dien for his thoughts on what the Congress would mean for the CPV's role in Vietnam, the role of a market economy, and the relationship between the state and private sectors. Dien replied that all of these issues were still under discussion and being "prepared," but that, broadly speaking, the discussions and decisions of the Congress would be based on twenty years of "doi moi" (renovation), particularly lessons learned and how to make the next ten to twenty years "consistent" and "integrated," Dien said.

17. (SBU) Regarding the economy, Dien continued, the Congress would reflect Vietnam's continued commitment to the process of transforming into a market economy. To do this, Vietnam had to develop other market components. In terms of the state sector, the two most important things were the state sector's efficiency and Vietnam's need to mobilize all of society's economic resources. On politics, Dien said that the Congress would work to ensure the continuing role of the party, the further "democratization" of society, and the strengthened solidarity of all the nation's people. The previous (ninth) Party Congress had had important language regarding solidarity, and the tenth Congress would help to concretize this, bringing together all in society, regardless of religion or ethnicity, for example. Unfortunately, Vietnam had yet to implement well all the economic-related commitments of the previous Congress, and the upcoming conclave would be an important benchmark for progress in this area. Regarding foreign policy, the tenth Party Congress would continue to push forward Vietnam's integration into the world economy. Vietnam's policy would continue to be friendly relations with all nations on the basis of respect for independence and sovereignty. In sum, the next Party Congress would seek to implement "doi moi" on a "deeper level and more broadly," Dien said.

18. (SBU) In the United States, the Ambassador noted, during the presidential election season, political debate was lively and open for the whole world to see. In Vietnam, as the Ambassador and Dien had observed during their last meeting, there was also much debate, but it took place "behind the screen." We did sometimes pick up indicators of this debate, however, and heard that sometimes older, retired party members still had opinions about things. In short, it was an interesting period, the Ambassador said. Dien responded that if one closely read the news, then it was possible to learn much.

19. (SBU) Turning to the subject of "peaceful evolution," the Ambassador said that, now and again, it was possible to see in the press references to "peaceful evolution," and it seemed that now was another wave of emphasis on this subject. In fact, there was recently an article about a conference for Vietnam's press on this subject. Those in the West saw peaceful evolution as a fantasy -- something not real -- and it was worrisome when we observed people worrying about something that did not exist. For example, there was something in the press about how a Vietnamese official described programs to bring Vietnamese students overseas as an attempt to "turn their minds" against the system. Because we read Vietnam's press and respected it, we wondered how seriously the Vietnamese believed these things, the Ambassador said.

110. (SBU) Dien replied that, as far as he knew, there was "nothing special" that had happened recently. It was true, however, that there were concerns regarding peaceful evolution. But, one had to understand peaceful evolution in the right way. As Vietnam continued to move in the direction of a market economy, officials and party members would learn to love making money, and there was the danger that they would lose their "morals and credibility." In the past, party members had sacrificed much for national independence and, as a result, had credibility with the people. In the new situation of today, the party had to educate people how not to let themselves be "destroyed or devalued." If that happened, officials and party members would lose the respect and credibility of the people. In the first, peaceful evolution was referring to Vietnam and the Vietnamese themselves. Vietnam had to emphasize the fight against decadence and the change in the quality of party members and officials. Turning to the example the Ambassador raised, Vietnam encouraged students to study abroad, and Dien could not understand the origin of the criticism of study abroad programs.

11. (SBU) Quoting Deng Xiaoping, the Ambassador said that, if one opened the window, flies and mosquitoes would come in. Originally, President Nixon had used the phrase "peaceful evolution," saying it was not a government strategy or policy, but something that would just happen. Dien agreed with the Ambassador that now was a fascinating time to live in Vietnam as it transformed, and the Ambassador concluded by expressing his hope that the United States would continue to play a role in Vietnam's process of change.

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